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Space Exploration Student Chapter at the University of Portland Wins Award Recognizing Participation of Women

Washington, D.C. and Strasbourg, France – The Chapter of Students for the Exploration and Development of Space (SEDS) at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon is the 2015 recipient of the ISU-WIA Prize for Participation of Women. The new student organization seeks to “empower [its] members to participate and make an impact in space exploration” as stated on the group’s Facebook page. Their membership is comprised of 40% women, with several of these women in leadership positions within the Chapter.

There is gender disparity between men and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and also specifically in the aerospace field, and this Participation Award, in a small but potentially significant way, addresses this issue by encouraging gender diversity within the SEDS chapters throughout the entire U.S. Winners of the award receive a Certificate of Recognition plus a cash prize, funded by the International Space University (ISU) and Women in Aerospace (WIA).

Callie Quezada, the University of Portland’s SEDS Chapter Spokesperson noted that “being a woman in STEM is challenging and often people do not understand the struggle involved. Without the support and encouragement I have received from both my peers and teachers, becoming a Senior Mechanical Engineer would [be] almost impossible.” The Award acts as an added benefit to university SEDS chapters that promote this type of gender inclusivity and support. As Ms. Quezada further elaborated, the high participation and retention of its female membership is largely due to support from the University of Portland’s faculty and staff. She emphasized that “female participation [in STEM] begins from the inside out. Our professors make it a point to give equal attention to every student.”

This inward-out approach is echoed by WIA Board Chair Michelle Brunswick, stating “we believe the award acts as an incentive to other SEDS chapters by inspiring them to be more diverse. Statistically the participation of women in STEM related fields, such as Aerospace, has been low. We hope that in providing recognition of groups that actively promote gender diversity, more women might seek careers in the STEM.”

The ISU and WIA have had a strong educational partnership since 2009. The Participation Award is a collaborative effort by both organizations to encourage more women to pursue careers in STEM. As noted by Steven Brody, ISU’s Vice President for North American Operations, “approximately one-quarter of ISU’s global alumni network are women, over one-third of its U.S. alumni are women, and in recent years, U.S. women enrollees have reached near-parity with U.S. men, setting a great example of what ISU seeks to help enable for the leadership of the aerospace field around the globe.”

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Women in Aerospace (WIA) is dedicated to increasing the leadership capabilities and visibility of women in the aerospace community. We acknowledge and promote innovative individuals who strive to advance the aerospace industry as a whole. Our membership, comprised of both women and men, share a passion for a broad spectrum of aerospace issues. These include human space flight, aviation, remote sensing, satellite communications, robotic space exploration, and the policy issues surrounding these fields, among others.

The International Space University was founded in 1987 at MIT in the USA with Sir Arthur C. Clarke as its Founding Chancellor. Now headquartered in Strasbourg, France with Dr. Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin as ISU’s current Chancellor, ISU is the world’s premier international space education institution. It is supported by major space agencies and aerospace organizations from around the world. The graduate level programs offered by ISU are dedicated to international, interdisciplinary, and intercultural education, professional development, and life-long learning. ISU offers a Master of Space Studies degree at its Central Campus in Strasbourg, and conducts the highly acclaimed summer-long Space Studies Program at different host institutions in locations spanning the globe. ISU programs are delivered by over 100 ISU faculty members in concert with invited industry and agency experts from institutions around the world. Since its founding, more than 4000 students from over 100 countries have graduated from ISU.



University of Portland's 2015-2016 SEDS Chapter